

LESSON THIRTEENTH.

ON THE SACRAMENTS IN GENERAL.

THIS lesson does not speak of any sacrament in particular, but upon all the sacraments taken together. It explains what we find in all the sacraments.

136 Q. What is a sacrament ?

A. A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace.

Three things are necessary to make a sacrament. There must be (1) "**An outward,**" that is, a visible, "**sign ;**" (2) this sign must have been instituted or given by Our Lord ; (3) it must give grace. Now, a sign is that which tells us that something else exists. Smoke indicates the presence of fire. A red light on a railroad tells us there is danger at the spot. Therefore, the outward signs in the sacraments tell us that there is in the sacraments something we do not see and which they signify and impart. For example, the outward sign in Baptism is the pouring of the water on the head of the person to be baptized, and the saying of the words. Water is generally used for cleaning purposes. Water, therefore, is used in Baptism as an outward sign to show that as the water cleans the body, so the grace given in Baptism cleans the soul. It is not a mere sign, for at the very moment that the priest pours the water and says the words of Baptism, by the pouring of the water and saying of the words with the proper intention the soul is cleansed from original sin ; that is, the inward grace is given by the application of the outward sign. Again, in Confirmation the outward sign is the anointing with oil, the

Bishop's prayer, and the placing of his hands upon us. Now what inward grace is given in Confirmation? A grace which strengthens us in our faith. Oil, therefore, is used for the outward sign in this sacrament, because oil gives strength and light.

In olden times the gladiators—men who fought with swords as prize-fighters do now with their hands—used oil upon their bodies to make them strong. Oil was used also to heal wounds. Thus in Confirmation the application of this outward sign of strength gives the inward grace of light and strength. Moreover, oil easily spreads itself over anything and remains on it. A drop of water falling on paper dries up quickly; but a drop of oil soaks in and spreads over it. So oil is used to show also that the grace of Confirmation spreads out over our whole lives, and strengthens us in our faith at all times.

Again, in Penance we have the outward sign when the priest raises his hand and pronounces over us the words of absolution.

If we did not have these outward signs how could any one know just at what time the graces are given? We can know now, for at the very moment the outward sign is applied the grace is given; because it is the application of the sign that by divine institution gives the grace, and thus the two must take place together.

“**Institution by Christ**” is absolutely necessary because He gives all grace, and He alone can determine the manner in which He wishes it distributed. The Church can distribute His grace, but only in the way He wishes. Hence it cannot make new sacraments or abolish old ones.

137 Q. How many sacraments are there?

A. There are seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony.

The life of our soul is in many ways similar to the life of our body. Our bodies must first be born, then strengthened,

then fed. When sick, we must be cured ; and when about to die, we must be taken care of. Then there must be some one to rule others, and there must be persons to be governed. In like manner, we are spiritually born into a new life by Baptism, we are strengthened by Confirmation, fed with the Holy Eucharist, and cured of the maladies of our souls by Penance. By Extreme Unction we are helped at the hour of death ; by Holy Orders our spiritual rulers are appointed by God ; and by Matrimony families, with a father at the head and children to be ruled, are established. Thus we have our spiritual life similar in many things to our physical or bodily life.

138 Q. Whence have the sacraments the power of giving grace ?

A. The sacraments have the power of giving grace from the merits of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord died to merit grace for us, and appointed the sacraments as the chief means by which it was to be given.

* 139 Q. What grace do the sacraments give ?

A. Some of the sacraments give sanctifying grace, and others increase it in our souls.

Baptism and Penance give this sanctifying grace when there is not any of it in the soul. But the other sacraments are received while we are in a state of grace, and they therefore increase the quantity of it in our souls.

* 140 Q. Which are the sacraments that give sanctifying grace ?

A. The sacraments that give sanctifying grace are Baptism and Penance ; and they are called sacraments of the dead.

“ Of the dead.” Not of a dead person ; for when a person is dead he cannot receive any of the sacraments. It is only while we live upon earth that we are on trial, and can do good

or evil, and merit grace. At death we receive simply our reward or punishment for what we have done while living. Therefore, sacraments of the dead mean sacraments given to a dead soul, that is, to a soul in mortal sin. When grace—its life—is all out of the soul it can do nothing to merit heaven; and we say it is dead, because the dead can do nothing for themselves. If a person receives—as many do—the sacrament of penance while his soul is not in a state of mortal sin, what then? Then the soul—already living—receives an increase of sanctifying grace, that is, greater spiritual life and strength.

* 141 Q. Why are Baptism and Penance called sacraments of the dead?

A. Baptism and Penance are called sacraments of the dead because they take away sin, which is the death of the soul, and give grace, which is its life.

* 142 Q. Which are the sacraments that increase sanctifying grace in the soul?

A. The sacraments that increase sanctifying grace in the soul are: Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony; and they are called sacraments of the living.

* 143 Q. Why are Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony called sacraments of the living?

A. Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony are called the sacraments of the living because those who receive them worthily are already living the life of grace.

* 144 Q. What sin does he commit who receives the sacraments of the living in mortal sin?

A. He who receives the sacraments of the living in mortal sin commits a sacrilege, which is a great sin, because it is an abuse of a sacred thing.

“Sacrilege.” There are other ways besides the unworthy reception of the sacraments in which a person may commit sacrilege. You could commit it by treating any sacred thing

with great disrespect. For example, by making common use of the sacred vessels used at the altar; by stealing from the church; by turning the church into a market, etc. You could commit it also by wilfully killing or wounding persons consecrated to God, such as nuns, priests, bishops, etc. Therefore sacrilege can be committed by wilfully abusing or treating with great irreverence any sacred person, sacred place, or sacred thing.

* 145 Q. Besides sanctifying grace, do the sacraments give any other grace?

A. Besides sanctifying grace, the sacraments give another grace, called sacramental.

* 146 Q. What is sacramental grace?

A. Sacramental grace is a special help which God gives to attain the end for which He instituted each sacrament.

For example, what was the end for which Penance was instituted? To forgive sins and keep us out of sin. Therefore the sacramental grace given in Penance is a grace that will enable us to overcome temptation and avoid the sins we have been in the habit of committing. When a person is ill the doctor's medicine generally produces two effects: one is to cure the disease and the other to strengthen the person so that he may not fall back into the old condition. Well, it is just the same in the sacraments; the grace given produces two effects: one is to sanctify us and the other to prevent us from falling into the same sins. Again, Confirmation was instituted that we might become more perfect Christians, stronger in our faith. Therefore the sacramental grace of Confirmation will strengthen us to profess our faith when circumstances require it; or when we are tempted to doubt any revealed truth, it will help us to overcome the temptation. So in all the sacraments we receive the sacramental grace or special help given to attain the end for which the sacraments were separately instituted.

147 Q. Do the sacraments always give grace?

A. The sacraments always give grace, if we receive them with the right dispositions.

“Right dispositions;” that is, if we do all that God and the Church require us to do when we receive them. For instance, in Penance the right disposition is to confess all our mortal sins as we know them, to be sorry for them, and have the determination never to commit them again. The right disposition for the Holy Eucharist is to be in a state of grace, and—except in special cases of sickness—fasting from midnight.

148 Q. Can we receive the sacraments more than once?

A. We can receive the sacraments more than once, except Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders.

Baptism is so important that if we do not receive it we cannot receive any other of the sacraments. Now, to administer Baptism validly, that is, properly, everything must be done exactly as Our Lord intended and the Church teaches. The proper kind of water and all the exact words must be used. Also, the water must touch the body, that is, the head, if possible. Now persons not knowing well how to baptize might neglect some of these things, and thus the person would not be baptized. The Church wishes to be certain that all its children are baptized; so when there is any doubt about the first baptism, it baptizes again conditionally, that is, the priest says in giving the baptism over again: If you are not baptized already, I baptize you now. Therefore if the person was rightly baptized the first time, the second ceremony has no effect; because the priest does not intend to give Baptism a second time. But if the first Baptism was not rightly given, then the second takes effect. In either case Baptism is given only once; for if the first was valid, the second is not given; and if the first was invalid, the second is given.

Converts to the Church are generally baptized condition-

ally, because there is doubt about the validity of the Baptism they received.

The sacraments may be given conditionally when we doubt if they were or can be validly given.

* 149 Q. Why can we not receive Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders more than once?

A. We cannot receive Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders more than once, because they imprint a character in the soul.

“A character.” It is a spiritual character, and remains forever, so that whether the person is in heaven or hell this mark will be seen. It will show that those having it were Christians, who received Baptism, Confirmation, or Holy Orders. If they are in heaven, these characters will shine out to their honor, and will show how well they used the grace God gave them. If they are in hell, these characters will be to their disgrace, and show how many gifts and graces God bestowed upon them, and how shamefully they abused all.

* 150 Q. What is the character which these sacraments imprint in the soul?

A. The character which these sacraments imprint in the soul is a spiritual mark which remains forever.

* 151 Q. Does this character remain in the soul even after death?

A. This character remains in the soul even after death: for the honor and glory of those who are saved; for the shame and punishment of those who are lost.